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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

CONFRONTING THE JFK ASSASSINATION

Where do we find hope when a peace-making president is assassinated by his own national security state?

Amateur snapshot, made with Kodak Brownie, of the Kennedys and Connallys in the motorcade about two minutes before the shooting in Dealey Plaza.

President John F. Kennedy in the Oval Office. Cecil Stoughton, White House photo

When President Kennedy stood up to the Pentagon and the CIA, he was treated as a traitor. A president was murdered by our own government agencies because he was seeking a more stable peace than relying on nuclear weapons.

by James W. Douglass

In the years that I have spent in researching and writing my book, *JFK and the Unspeakable*, I have learned about the hope that comes from our confronting the truth of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Concerned friends have asked me over the years if engaging in such a probe into darkness hasn't made me profoundly depressed. On the contrary, it has given me great hope.

As Martin Luther King said, the truth crushed to earth will rise again. Gandhi spoke hopefully of experiments in truth, because they take us into the most powerful force on earth and in existence — truth-force, satyagraha. That is how I think of this work, as an experiment in truth — one that will open us up, both personally and as a country, to a process of nonviolent transformation.

I believe this experiment we are doing into the dark truth of Dallas (and of Washington, D.C.) can be the most hopeful experience of our lives. But, it does require patience and tenacity to confront the unspeakable. We, first of all, need to take the time to recognize the sources in our history for what happened in Dallas on November 22, 1963.

'Plausible deniability'

The doctrine of "plausible deniability" in an old government document provides us with a source of the assassination of President Kennedy. The document was issued in 1948, one year after the CIA was established, and 15 years before JFK's murder. That document, National Security Council directive 10/2, on June 18, 1948, "gave the highest sanction of the [U.S.] government to a broad range of covert operations" [1] — propaganda, sabotage, economic warfare, subversion of all kinds — that were seen as necessary to "win" the Cold War against the Communists.

The government's condition for those covert activities by U.S. agencies, coordinated by the CIA, was that they be "so planned and executed that... if uncovered the U.S. government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them." [2]

In the 1950s, under the leadership of CIA Director Allen Dulles, the doctrine of "plausible deniability" became the CIA's green light to assassinate national leaders, conduct secret military operations, and overthrow governments that our government thought were on the wrong side in the Cold War. "Plausible deniability" meant our intelligence agencies, acting as paramilitary groups, had to lie and cover their tracks so effectively that there would be no trace of U.S. government responsibility for criminal activities on an ever-widening scale.

Truman warns about the CIA

The man who proposed this secret, subversive process in 1948, diplomat George Kennan, said later, in light of its consequences, that it was "the greatest mistake I ever made." [3] President Harry Truman, under whom the CIA was created, and during whose presidency the plausible deniability doctrine was authorized, had deep regrets. He said in a statement on December 22, 1963:

"For some time I have been disturbed by the way the CIA has been diverted from its original assignment. It has become an operational and at times a policy-making arm of the Government. This has led to trouble and may have compounded our difficulties in several explosive areas.

"We have grown up as a nation, respected for our free institutions and for our ability to maintain a free and open society. There is something about the way the CIA has been functioning that is casting a shadow over our historic position and I feel that we need to correct it." [4]

Truman later remarked: "The CIA was set up by me for the sole purpose of getting all the available information to the president. It was not intended to operate as an international agency engaged in strange activities." [5]

Truman's sharp warning about the CIA, and the fact that his warning was published one month to the day after JFK's assassination, should have given this country pause. However, his statement appeared only in an early edition of *The Washington Post*, then vanished without comment from public view. [6]

What George Kennan and Harry Truman realized much too late was that, in the name of national security, they had unwittingly allowed an alien force to invade a democracy. As a result, we now had to deal with a government agency authorized to carry out a broad range of criminal activities on an international scale, theoretically accountable to the president, but with no genuine accountability to anyone.

Assassinations in America

First in a three-part series on political assassinations by James Douglass. See the January and February 2011 issues of *Street Spirit* for parts 2 and 3.

Plausible deniability became a rationale for the CIA's interpretation of what the executive branch's wishes might be. But for the Agency's crimes to remain plausibly deniable, the less said the better — to the point where CIA leaders' creative imaginations simply took over. It was all for the sake of "winning" the Cold War by any means necessary and without implicating the more visible heads of government.

One assumption behind Kennan's proposal unleashing the CIA for its war against Communism was that the Agency's criminal power could be confined to covert action outside the borders of the United States, with immunity from its lethal power granted to U.S. citizens. That assumption proved to be wrong.

The National Security State

During the Cold War, the hidden growth of the CIA's autonomous power corresponded to the public growth of what was called a fortress state. What had been a struggling post-war democracy in our country was replaced by the institutions of a national security state.

President Truman had laid the founda-

See **Confronting the Unspeakable** *page 5*

Ugly Laws, Bum Blockades and Sundown Towns

Today's anti-homeless laws have their roots in the prejudicial laws that fueled Jim Crow segregation and anti-Okie discrimination.

by Paul Boden, WRAP

The Quality of Life ordinances enacted in cities across the nation to outlaw and banish homeless people from certain areas are our contemporary version of the vagrancy laws that have been with us for centuries. In the South, they were used to force freed slaves back to the plantation. In the North, they were used to instill a Protestant work ethic in indigent whites.

This compulsion to control labor and separate the "worthy" from the "unworthy" is deeply ingrained in our culture and institutions. By drawing comparisons between today's anti-homeless legislation and three specific episodes in U.S. history, we hope to shake the complacency surrounding our present civil rights failures. If we don't, future generations will surely ridicule our hypocrisies as we do those who came before us.

A Wolf in sheep's clothing

How ugly is too ugly? How dark is too dark? How poor is too poor? These perverse questions were at the heart of ugly laws, sundown towns, and the Bum Blockade — unconstitutional predecessors of today's Quality of Life ordinances.

Unlike the above policies of segregation that brazenly named the objects of their scorn — "masterless men," "cripples," "Negroes," and "Bolshevik bums" — today's vagrancy laws are dressed up in post-civil rights legalese. By targeting behaviors like sleeping, lying down, sitting, and urinating in public, Quality of Life laws attempt to sidestep the protection afforded by the Civil Rights and Americans with Disabilities Acts.

In reality, this legal fine-tuning is the same old wolf in sheep's clothing. The ableism, racism, and classism that underwrote yesteryear's ugly laws, sundown towns, and the Bum Blockade can be found in today's Quality of Life ordinances.

The words of Martin Luther King from a Birmingham jail ring as true now as they did in 1963: "We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people."

Many liberals and progressives, when aware of them, look back at past exclusionary practices with scorn and shame, yet they are silent when it comes to current battles over public space, freedom of movement, and civil rights. We bring the following history to public attention so that we may wake up to what Quality of Life ordinances really are.

What follows draws heavily on the scholarship of Susan Schweik, author of "The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public," James Loewen, author of *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism,* and Hailey Giczy, "The Bum Blockade: Los Angeles and the Great Depression."

The Ugly Laws

Beginning in the second half of the 19th century in San Francisco, other cities, including Portland, Chicago, Omaha, Columbus, Cleveland, and Denver began enacting "unsightly beggar ordinances." These ordinances came to be known as "ugly laws." Their main purpose was to control disabled people's freedom of movement and speech in public space.

Chicago's 1881 ordinance read: "Any person who is diseased, maimed, mutilated, or in any way deformed, so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object, or an improper person to be allowed in or on the streets, highways, thoroughfares, or public places in this city, shall not therein or thereon expose himself to public view, under the penalty of a fine of $1 [about $20 today] for each offense."

"The Lord Provides" Lithograph, 1934, by Jacob Burck, courtesy of M. Lee Stone Fine Prints

L.A. Police Chief James Davis hurled invectives at Dust Bowl refugees. He linked the influx of "Okies" with crime and financial loss to scare up support for his "Bum Blockade."

The laws specifically proscribed a person from exposing a disability in public space for the purpose of begging. They were one of the country's first panhandling laws. A large percentage of ugly laws had "poorhouse clauses" that banished disabled people to jails or almshouses if they couldn't pay the fine.

Susan Schweik writes, "The crude elements of ugly law may be broken down roughly as follows: the call for harsh policing; anti-begging; systemized suspicion set up to winnow the deserving from the undeserving; suppression of acts of solidarity by and for marginalized urban social groups; and structural and institutional repulsion of disabled people, whether by design or by default. None of these have disappeared since the demise of formally enacted unsightly beggar ordinances."

The last known arrest stemming from an ugly law happened in Omaha only 36 years ago. Ugly laws attempted to accomplish what cities are now aiming to achieve with sit/lie bans and anti-panhandling ordinances: to reinforce social boundaries and marginalize those considered "unsightly" in the newly preserved historic downtowns of the closed city.

Sundown Towns

In response to the upheaval in "race relations" caused by Reconstruction and the Great Migration following the Civil War, white towns from Florida to Oregon barred African Americans and other despised ethnic groups like "Jewish, Chinese, Japanese, Native, and Mexican Americans" from entering them. One such town in Illinois went by the name "Anna," short for "Ain't No Niggers Allowed."

Known as sundown towns, these white supremacist redoubts got their name from the customary signs placed at the entrance of town warning targeted ethnic groups "not to let the sun set on you" within city limits. Government complicity, vigilante justice, and race riots backed these threats.

Lesser known than their southern counterparts — Black Codes and Jim Crow — sundown towns were far from being a marginal phenomenon. There were thousands of them and many could be found in elite suburbs right outside of metropolitan areas like New York City and Chicago.

James Loewen concludes, "From the towns that passed sundown ordinances, to the county sheriffs who escorted black would-be residents back across the county line, to the states that passed laws enabling municipalities to zone out 'undesirables,' to the federal government — whose lending and insuring policies from the 1930s to 1960s required sundown neighborhoods and suburbs — our governments openly favored white supremacy and helped to create and maintain all-white communities. So did our banks, realtors, and police chiefs."

The Bum Blockade

"Bolshevik bums." "Won't workers." "Migratory criminals." "Two-legged locusts." Los Angeles Police Chief James Davis hurled invectives like these at Dust Bowl refugees in the pages of *The Los Angeles Times* throughout 1935. Like contemporary Quality of Life campaigns, Chief Davis linked the influx of "Okies" with crime and financial loss to scare up support for his "Bum Blockade."

The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce did its part by stoking nativist resentment. They reported that migrants were costing taxpayers millions of dollars a month in state relief — aid that many struggling Californians were unable to receive. The public relations campaign around the Bum Blockade fueled a nasty parochialism that drove a stake between segments of the working and unemployed poor, scapegoating those from other places for the high unemployment and long welfare rolls wracking the state.

In 1936, Police Chief Davis took matters into his own hands, enforcing an aggressive fingerprinting and deportation campaign for anyone arrested on vagrancy charges in Los Angeles.

He also took the extraordinary measure of sending well over 100 officers to the borders of California and Oregon, Arizona, and Nevada. Officers set up blockades to question incoming travelers if they had money or work. If they didn't, they were told to either go back to from where they came or face hard labor. Around the same time, California put an anti-Okie law on the books that made it a misdemeanor to bring an "indigent person" who wasn't a resident into the state.

Such measures directed at "Okies" spurred John Steinbeck to write in *The Grapes of Wrath,* "Well, Okie use'ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you're a dirty son of a bitch. Okie means you're scum."

The Bum Blockade eventually failed because it was too expensive and the Supreme Court struck down California's anti-Okie Law as a violation of the Interstate Commerce Clause.

Hailey Giczy writes, "In order to preserve the homogeneity of Los Angeles' 'imagined community' of wealthy and culturally advanced Anglo-Saxons, tactics used to exclude racial groups were employed to attack class groups, raising exclusionary sentiment in Angelinos which fueled a fear of moral and aesthetic degradation."

An Emphatic "No!"

Vestiges of the ugly laws, sundown towns, and Bum Blockade persist in our current Quality of Life ordinances. They create second-class citizenship, criminalize poverty and disability, close public space, and encourage vigilante justice. The corporate media arouses fear and dehumanizes the poor and disabled, business groups like the Chamber of Commerce demand the state protect their interests, and police overstep the constitutional limits of their power.

Throughout this sordid history, courageous people have stood up and declared an emphatic "no!" to policies that exclude, segregate, and deny universal human dignity. Society can learn much by highlighting the work of those carrying on this tradition of resistance, those who today are demanding social justice.

Paul Boden is the organizing director of the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP).

Street Spirit

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Obama Woos the 'Economic Royalists'

The last thing we need is further acquiescence to the economic royalists. What we need is exactly the opposite: leadership to push back against the right-wing ideologues and the forces they represent.

by Norman Solomon

In his first term, President Franklin D. Roosevelt denounced "the economic royalists." He drew the line against the heartless rich: "They are unanimous in their hate for me — and I welcome their hatred."

What a different Democratic president we have today. For two years — from putting Wall Street operatives at the top of his economic team to signaling that he'll go along with extension of Bush tax cuts for the wealthy — Barack Obama has increasingly made a mockery of hopes for a green New Deal.

The news from the White House keeps getting grimmer. Since the midterm election, Obama has concluded that he must be more conciliatory toward the ascendant Republican leadership in Congress — and must do more to appease big business.

Fifteen days after the election, the *Washington Post* reported that Obama — seeking a replacement for departing top economic adviser Lawrence Summers — "is eager to recruit someone from the business community for the job to help repair the president's frayed relationship with corporate America."

The last thing we need is further acquiescence to the economic royalists. What we need is exactly the opposite: leadership to push back against the Republican Party's right-wing ideologues and the forces they represent. We need principled backbones in high places — and much stronger progressive activism at the grassroots.

In moral and electoral terms, the status quo is indefensible. Economic realities include high unemployment, routine home foreclosures, huge tax breaks for large corporations, and widening gaps between the wealthy and the rest of us — in tandem with endless war and runaway military spending.

Escalation of warfare in Afghanistan is running parallel to escalation of class war—waged from the top down—in Washington. The presidentially appointed co-chairs of the deficit commission, Alan Simpson and Erskine Bowles, are pushing scenarios that would undermine Social Security.

Let's get a grip on matters of principle.

More and more warfare in Afghanistan? Extending massive tax cuts for the wealthy? Promoting plans to slash Social Security and Medicare? Pretending that "clean coal" is not an oxymoron? Failing to uphold habeas corpus and other precious civil liberties?

The best way to fight the Republican Party is to stop giving ground to it. The best way to defeat right-wing, xenophobic "populism" is to build genuine progressive populism. In the process, we can draw on the spirit of the New Deal.

Back in the 1930s, millions of progressive activists — under all sorts of names — fought for economic equity, while FDR became willing to make common cause with them. Today, our scope of understanding has grown to include more dimensions of social justice and ecological imperatives.

These days, progressives have plenty of reasons to feel discouraged. But we have a lot more good reasons to rededicate ourselves to the vital tasks ahead.

A much better world is possible.

Si se puede!

Norman Solomon is co-chair of the Healthcare Not Warfare campaign, launched by Progressive Democrats of America.

Franklin D. Roosevelt denounced the heartless rich. Art by Victor Arnautoff

FDR: "I Welcome Their Hatred!"

"We know now that government by organized money is just as dangerous as government by organized mob!"

— Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Extract from FDR's famous 1936 speech in Madison Square Garden

"For twelve years this nation was afflicted with hear-nothing, see-nothing, do-nothing government. The nation looked to government but the government looked away.

Nine mocking years with the golden calf and three long years of the scourge! Nine crazy years at the ticker and three long years in the breadlines! Nine mad years of mirage and three long years of despair!

Powerful influences strive today to restore that kind of government with its doctrine that that government is best which is most indifferent.

For nearly four years, you have had an Administration which instead of twirling its thumbs has rolled up its sleeves. We will keep our sleeves rolled up!

We had to struggle with the old enemies of peace — business and financial monopoly, speculation, reckless banking, class antagonism, sectionalism, war profiteering. They had begun to consider the government of the United States as a mere appendage to their own affairs.

We know now that government by organized money is just as dangerous as government by organized mob! Never before in all our history have these forces been so united against one candidate as they stand today. They are unanimous in their hate for me — and I welcome their hatred!"

The Government's War on Disabled People

President Obama was supposed to redistribute the wealth, yet this looks more like stealing from the poor and giving to the rich. Once again, the poor and disabled have been shortchanged.

by Jack Bragen

It seems that those legislators who make the state and federal laws would rather that all disabled people fade out of existence, or go live in an institution. Not only does the government want to eliminate the public benefits that allow us to barely get by in society, but at the same time they have increased the barriers that exist toward holding part-time employment.

For most people with disabilities, it is too much to expect that we get a regular nine-to-five job, should such a job be available to us, which normally it isn't. It seems that, short of winning the lottery (and we can't afford lottery tickets and at the same time pay rent), our only alternative is to get part-time employment to try to supplement the meager benefits that we get from the government.

I know someone who tried to work at a part-time job by becoming an IHSS (In Home Support Services) caregiver for another disabled person. Almost immediately, her SSI income was slashed drastically. Soon on the coattails of this, her rent that she was responsible for under HUD was raised. These reductions in benefits were based on gross pay, not on the take-home amount. Additionally, she was responsible for steep union dues. Within a few months of working as an IHSS caregiver, it became clear that this worker had less total income as a result of getting a job.

On top of this is the fact that our overall benefits have become more scarce under a series of ruthless cuts. The SSI dollar amount has been slashed several times in a row, by a total, for some, of over $100 a month. When you're getting a total income of $800 a month to begin with, losing $100 of it is significant.

Our benefits under Medi-Cal for eye and dental care have been eliminated. I guess now we are supposed to go around toothless and blind. And under SSDI, there has been no cost-of-living increase for about the last three years.

At the same time, food prices have gone up, and a gallon of gas is a couple dollars more. The renter's credit, something that gave a few hundred dollars of relief to the poor on an annual basis, is gone. The amount that Section 8 housing will pay for a one- or two-bedroom apartment has been reduced, and disabled people have to make up the difference.

If a person is ambitious enough to try self-employment, since no one will give them a job, try paying for bonding, licensing and insurance out of your startup capital, and then see how much you will need to earn to pay that overhead. And just where does this startup capital I am talking about come from? I haven't answered that yet.

If you feel clever and your field of self-employment is going to be computers, keep in mind that it is likely that your advertising costs will be more than your gross receipts for a given time period: The field is saturated with unemployed techies.

If your field of self-employment is janitorial or some type of manual labor, good luck performing the job while taking Zyprexa, Abilify, Depakote, or other of the new medications. These drugs can alleviate some of the symptoms of mental illness. Yet, coincidentally, they cause severe lethargy, which will slow down your work pace to below a competitive level.

President Obama was supposed to redistribute the wealth, yet this looks more like stealing from the poor and giving to the rich. Once again, the poor and disabled have been shortchanged even by our own Democratic Party.

The struggle of the mentally ill or otherwise disabled is multifaceted, difficult, and sometimes lonely. It seems there are few allies in this battle, other than our disabled peers, as well as family members who may not completely understand what it's like to deal with a disability and subsist on such a severely limited income.

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Street Spirit is published by the **American Friends Service Committee (AFSC).** Homeless vendors receive 50 papers a day for free, earn income and find a job providing a positive alternative to panhandling, and educate the community about social justice issues. Please **donate** or **subscribe** to *Street Spirit* ! Help us remain an independent voice for justice!

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Creative Acts of Housing Liberation in San Francisco

by Carol Harvey

On November 26, Black Friday, Creative Housing Liberation held a "Housing Harvest" rally at 16th and Mission in San Francisco, with songs and speeches followed by a tour of four vacant neighborhood properties.

The event was preceded on Thursday by a housing takeover intended to showcase some of the 36,000 housing units currently wasting away vacant in San Francisco and to publicize the quiet savagery of 36,000 unused spaces in a city where, officially, more than 6,000 city dwellers sleep on cold concrete, with an estimated count of 15,000 homeless.

Paul Boden, organizing director of Western Regional Advocacy Project, reminded the crowd of "allies in Portland, Seattle, Santa Cruz, L.A., Oakland, and Berkeley," poor Chicagoans, public housing residents losing homes through bad mortgages — all "resisting, and fighting back." Millions across the country and this world are being dehumanized by the commodification of housing, he said.

In a Wednesday night promotion for the Black Friday occupation, housing occupier Jeremy Miller told JR of KPFA's Hard Knock Radio that housing occupations are being conducted worldwide, including Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela.

Kiilu Nyasha told the crowd that homelessness kills. "They don't want you to know how many people are literally dying on the streets of this very rich city," Kiilu said. "People of the city, of the world, we have to unite. We have to embrace each other's differences and come together based on our common human rights. We have a right to a home."

After S'Bu Zikode showed a film Wednesday in San Francisco about the *South African shack dwellers movement*, he told Kiilu, "The young people are saying, 'No land. No house. No job. No bread. No vote.'"

"The next time these horrible politicians come banging on your door," Kiilu said, "you just tell them, 'My vote is a vote of no confidence.'"

James Chionsini, an MC and organizer, explained how he clarified for his four-year-old daughter Helen that the deprived rich don't understand that people enjoy sharing things like cookies and housing. He felt the American Psychiatric Association's *DSM IV* should classify greed as a treatable emotional disorder.

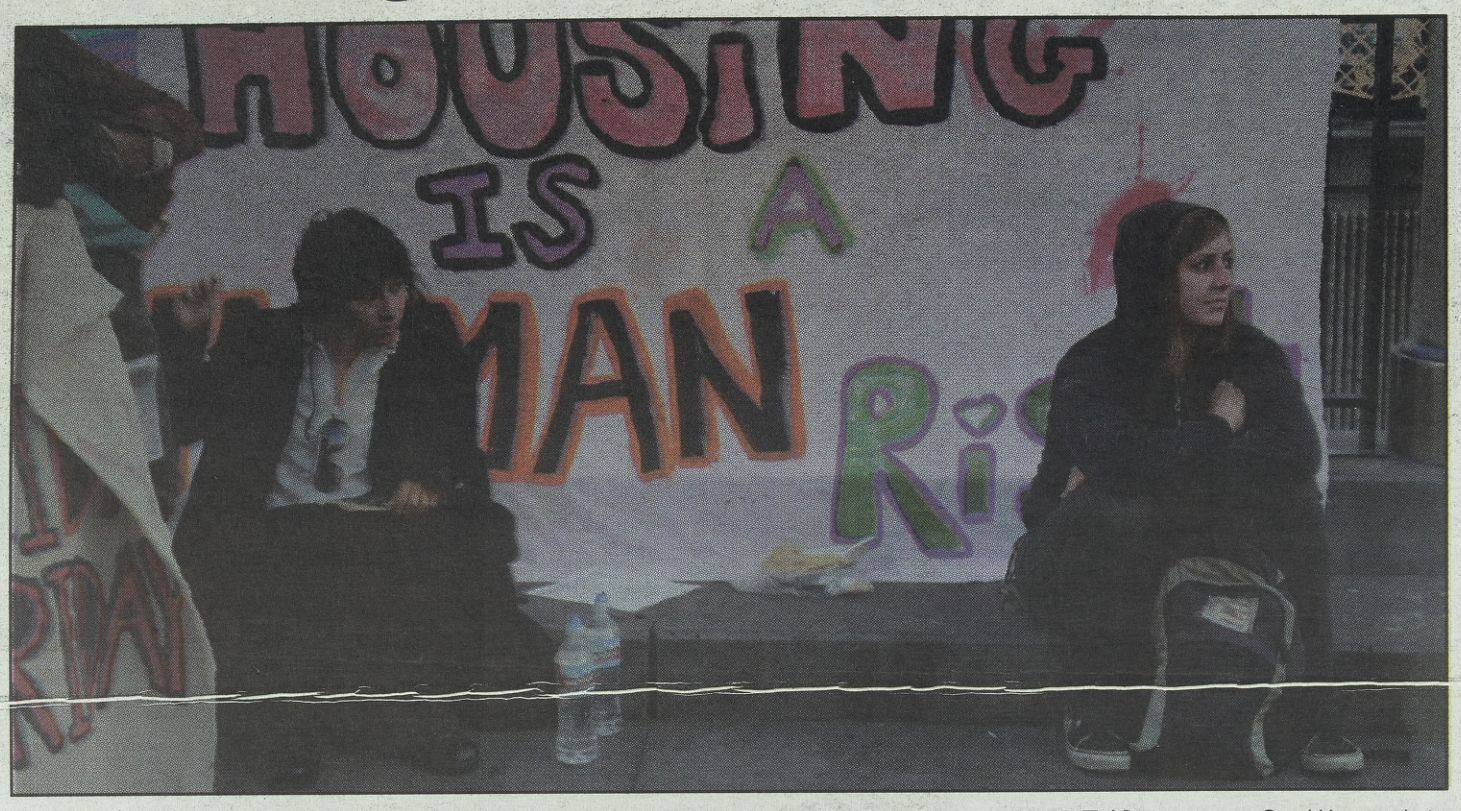
Lydia Heather Blumberg asked the 100-strong crowd, "Aren't you guys glad we had something more fun to do than go shopping today?"

A Loose-Knit Coalition

Creative Housing Liberation is not a formal organization. It is the organizing name for one or more events conducted by a loosely knit network of like-minded citizens distressed by San Francisco's housing crisis. Participants agree that civil disobedience and direct action are necessary to defend the right to housing for working-class people. In the spring of 2010, they utilized their First Amendment rights and right of dissent, participating in at least six "open occupations" of vacant residential San Francisco buildings.

At Easter, Homes Not Jails, another housing activist group, occupied the San Jose Avenue home of Jose Morales, 78, evicted after 42 years through an Ellis Act takeover by a landlord acting in bad faith.

After 18 years of disuse, on May Day, 2010, the Phoenix School at 15th and Mission was squatted. One occupier said, "The State used a sickening display of force — two SFPD battalions." Eighty riot cops, "disappointed they didn't get to discharge their weapons," overwhelmed "eight people who were voluntarily arrested."



"Housing Is A Human Right." Protesters take over a vacant building in San Francisco on Black Friday. Carol Harvey photo

In response to the closing of the homeless shelter at 150 Otis, a sit-in was held at 170 Otis, the Health and Human Services Administration Building, organized by "Direct Action To Stop The Cuts" with help from Food Not Bombs and leaders in the homeless and housing rights movement in San Francisco.

On July 18, 2010, Direct Action To Stop The Cuts successfully, and with much publicity, occupied the Sierra Hotel at Mission and 20th. According to City records, the multi-unit property had been vacant almost 20 years. This action protested slashes in the City budget to housing and homeless services that are expected to result in an increased number of homeless deaths this year.

On October 10, 2010, the first World Homeless Day, Creative Housing Liberation led an occupation of the Leslie Hotel on Eddy. After a Civic Center rally, activists led the public on tours through a beautifully appointed, 68-room apartment building left vacant two years by a landlord living in Europe. Unhoused folks regularly sleep on the vestibule and surrounding Tenderloin sidewalks.

Matt Crain noted that 14 out of the 18 occupiers were committed to taking a voluntary arrest if they had collectively chosen to do so. However, the residents made a decision to vacate the premises before eviction, demonstrating that housing occupations need not end with arrest if the occupiers choose otherwise.

"The fact is, these folks care about a lot of issues; housing is very personal to them," Crain said, adding that 16 of the 18 folks who occupied on World Homeless Day were formerly homeless or currently without housing.

Crain said, "Many are squatters who choose to occupy and take direct action every day — not just Housing Demo Day — by living in abandoned buildings and not going through the system."

Now that San Francisco voters and merchants have passed Proposition L, the sit/lie law, even sitting or sleeping in public while poor has become a crime. Resting, in itself, has become an act of civil disobedience.

Thanks-Taking Dinner

On the Thursday before the Black Friday rally, in an act of "creative audacity," participants "pre-occupied" a vacant residential property. They moved in, took a quick look around, and shared a quiet "Thanks-Taking" dinner. "Thanks-Taking" was an alternative to a day when so many celebrate an illusion, said one occupier: "That our country was founded by brave settlers who created a nation of peace, prosperity and abundance, when not only did we steal the land, but we annihilated an entire race of our fellow man."

Before the more public demonstration on Friday, Thursday's action was to be a private occupation by people taking care of themselves, learning from each other, sharing the space, a meal, and one day together. Then they tried to sleep.

Creative Housing Liberation would like to invite "all kinds of folks, including families," to be involved in future housing occupations. Families are the largest new homeless group, a number that is skyrocketing since the housing foreclosure scandals and the economic crisis began.

Families and immigrants are the most invisible segments of the population experiencing homelessness in San Francisco. The network is reaching out to all people experiencing homelessness for their voices to be heard, and their stories to be told.

Creative Housing Liberation organizers, Crain said, "look forward to engaging with, and giving voice to, all members of our community who are experiencing homelessness, most especially families and those who are undocumented."

The best way for people to find out about their next action is by intermittently checking the Indy bay calendar "where our events are always listed."

The occupation was interrupted when a property manager did a random check at about 6:30 a.m. Friday morning. All occupiers were able to collect their resources and vacate, avoiding interaction with the manager or police.

"In lieu of the open occupation," Crain said, "we did a tour around the 16th and Mission neighborhood to draw attention back to the Phoenix School, then to 80 Julian Street owned by a nonprofit, vacant and squatted for many years, then to 180 Dolores, a beautiful but fortified condo, then a few doors away to 200 Dolores."

Kim Rohrbach, a volunteer tenant's counselor at the S.F. Tenant's Union, explained how landlords use various legal constructions, like the Ellis Act, to appear to get out of the housing market, but instead empty a building so it's more attractive to wealthier prospective buyers.

They're not actually getting out of the housing market, Rohrbach said, merely "using a legal construction to evict people so they can turn over the property with more ease to landlords who can then jack up the rent seeing that the previous rent-controlled tenants have been removed from the property."

One organizer summarized the occupation: "We successfully occupied for 27 hours. We shared Thanks-Taking Day together. We were unfortunately unable to proceed with the entire demonstration which would have included an open occupation." But he looks to future actions.

"We have these resources," he said. "There's no reason why we shouldn't be sharing them equitably throughout all elements of society."

And, he added, "No one is illegal."

Ronnie Goodman: The Color of Hope

Linocuts, Drawings, & Paintings from San Quentin and Folsom State Prisons

December 4 – 30, 2010

***Reception:* Saturday, Dec. 4, 7:00 - 11:00 pm**
Precita Eyes Mural Arts & Visitors Center
2981 24th Street, San Francisco

Ronnie Goodman created a large body of artwork while doing time at San Quentin and Folsom State Prisons. It has only been a month since his release.

For most artists in prison the tendency is to create work about life on the outside. But Ronnie Goodman is an exception to this. His work is about life in prison. Sometimes his work is about the beauty that an artistic eye can find in the day to day. Sometimes his work is about the struggles of life in a cage.

Ronnie Goodman ***"San Quentin Jazz"***

Confronting the Unspeakable

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tions for that silent takeover by his momentous decision to end the Second World War with a demonstration of nuclear weapons on the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in order to stop a Soviet advance to Japan. Truman's further, post-war decision for U.S. nuclear dominance in the world — rather than allowing for international control of nuclear weapons — was his second disastrous mistake, in terms of initiating the nuclear arms race in the world and subverting democracy in the United States.

A democracy within a national security state cannot survive. The president's decision to base our security on nuclear weapons created the contradiction of a democracy ruled by the dictates of the Pentagon. A democratic national security state is a contradiction in terms.

The insecure basis of our security then became weapons that could destroy the planet. To protect the security of that illusory means of security, which was absolute destructive power, we now needed a ruling elite of national security managers with an authority above that of our elected representatives.

So from that point on, our military-industrial managers made the real decisions of state. President Truman simply ratified their decisions and entrenched their power, as he did with the establishment of the CIA, and as his National Security Council did with its endorsement of plausible deniability.

His successor, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, also failed to challenge in his presidency what he warned against at its end — the military-industrial complex. He left the critical task of resisting that anti-democratic power in the hands of the next president, John F. Kennedy.

Saving the planet is treason

When President Kennedy then stood up to the Pentagon, the CIA, and the military-industrial complex, he was treated as a traitor. His attempt to save the planet from the weapons of his own nation was regarded as treason. The doctrine of "plausible deniability" allowed for the assassination of a president seen as a national security risk himself.

The CIA's "plausible deniability" for crimes of state, as exemplified by JFK's murder, corresponds in our politics to what the Trappist monk and spiritual writer Thomas Merton called "the Unspeakable." Merton wrote about the unspeakable in the 1960s, when an elusive, systemic evil was running rampant through this country and the world. The Vietnam War, the escalating nuclear arms race, and the interlocking murders of John Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy were all signs of the unspeakable.

For Merton, the unspeakable was ultimately a void, an emptiness of any meaning, an abyss of lies and deception. He wrote the following description of the unspeakable shortly after the publication of The Warren Report, which he could have been describing: "[The Unspeakable] is the void that contradicts everything that is spoken even before the words are said; the void that gets into the language of public and official declarations at the very moment when they are pronounced, and makes them ring dead with the hollowness of the abyss." [7]

The void of the unspeakable is the dark abyss, the midnight reality of plausible deniability, that we face when we peer into our national security state's murder of President Kennedy. And that is precisely where hope begins.

Kennedy delivers the commencement address at American University in Washington, D.C., on June 10, 1963. *Saturday Review* editor Norman Cousins summed up the significance of this remarkable speech: "At American University on June 10, 1963, President Kennedy proposed an end to the Cold War."

Photo by Cecil Stoughton, in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

A profound source of hope

Why President Kennedy was murdered can be, I believe, a profound source of hope to us all, when we truly understand his story.

Now how can that possibly be? The *why* of his murder as a source of hope?

Let's begin with the way Kennedy himself looked at the question.

One summer weekend in 1962 while out sailing with friends, President Kennedy was asked what he thought of *Seven Days in May*, a best-selling novel that described a military takeover in the United States. JFK said he would read the book. He did so that night. The next day, Kennedy discussed with his friends the possibility of their seeing such a coup in the United States. These words were spoken by him after the Bay of Pigs and before the Cuban Missile Crisis:

"It's possible. It could happen in this country, but the conditions would have to be just right. If, for example, the country had a young president, and he had a Bay of Pigs, there would be a certain uneasiness. Maybe the military would do a little criticizing behind his back, but this would be written off as the usual military dissatisfaction with civilian control. Then if there were another Bay of Pigs, the reaction of the country would be, 'Is he too young and inexperienced?' The military would almost feel that it was their patriotic obligation to stand ready to preserve the integrity of the nation, and only God knows just what segment of democracy they would be defending if they overthrew the elected establishment."

Pausing a moment, Kennedy went on, "Then, if there were a third Bay of Pigs, it could happen."

Waiting again until his listeners absorbed his meaning, he concluded with an old Navy phrase, "But it won't happen on my watch." [8]

Let's remember that JFK gave himself three strikes before he would be out by a coup, although he bravely said it wouldn't happen on his watch.

As we know, and as he knew, the young president *did* have a Bay of Pigs. The president bitterly disappointed the CIA, the military, and the CIA-trained Cuban exile brigade by deciding to accept defeat at the Bay of Pigs rather than escalate the battle. Kennedy realized after the fact that he had been drawn into a CIA scenario whose authors assumed he would be forced by circumstances to drop his advance restrictions against the use of U.S. combat forces.

He had been lied to in such a way that, in order to "win" at the Bay of Pigs, he would be forced to send in U.S. troops. But JFK surprised the CIA and the military by choosing instead to accept a loss. "They couldn't believe," he said, "that a new president like me wouldn't panic and try to save his own face. Well, they had me figured all wrong." [9]

Kennedy sacks CIA leaders

We know how JFK reacted to the CIA's setting him up. He was furious. When the enormity of the Bay of Pigs disaster came home to him, he said he wanted "to splinter the CIA in a thousand pieces and scatter it to the winds." [10]

He ordered an investigation into the whole affair, under the very watchful eyes of his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy. He fired CIA Director Allen Dulles, Deputy Director Richard Bissell, Jr., and Deputy Director General Charles Cabell. That was a huge decision — firing the top of the CIA's hierarchy, including the legendary leader who had come to personify the agency, Allen Dulles.

The president then took steps "to cut the CIA budget in 1962 and again in 1963, aiming at a 20 percent reduction by 1966." [11] He was cutting back the CIA's power in very concrete ways, step by step.

We know how the CIA and the Cuban exile community regarded Kennedy in turn because of his refusal to escalate the battle at the Bay of Pigs. They hated him for it. They did not forget what they thought was unforgivable.

In terms of JFK's own analysis of the threat of an overthrow of his presidency, he saw the Bay of Pigs as the first strike against him. It was the first big stand he took against his national security elite, and therefore the first cause of a possible coup d'etat.

However, in terms of our Constitution, our genuine security, and world peace, the position Kennedy took in facing down the CIA and the military at the Bay of Pigs, rather than surrendering to their will, was in itself a source of hope. No previous post-war president had shown such courage. Truman and Eisenhower had, in effect, turned over the power of their office to their national security managers.

Kennedy was instead acting like he *really was the president of this country* — by saying a strong no to the security elite on a critical issue. If we the people had truly understood what he was doing then on our behalf, we would have thought the president's stand a deeply hopeful one.

JFK alienates CIA and military

In terms of his *Seven Days in May* analysis of a coming coup, John Kennedy *did* have a second "Bay of Pigs." The president alienated the CIA and the military a second time by his decisions during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

JFK had to confront the unspeakable in the Missile Crisis in the form of total nuclear war. At the height of that terrifying conflict, he felt the situation spiraling out of control, especially because of the actions of his generals.

For example, with both sides on hair-trigger alert, the U.S. Air Force test-fired missiles from California across the Pacific, deliberately trying to provoke the Soviets in a way that could justify our superior U.S. forces blanketing the USSR with an all-out nuclear attack. As we know from Kennedy's secretly taped meeting with his Joint Chiefs of Staff on October 19, 1962, the Joint Chiefs were pushing him relentlessly to launch a preemptive strike on Cuba, and ultimately the Soviet Union. In this encounter, the Joint Chiefs' disdain for their young commander-in-chief is summed up by Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis LeMay when he said:

LeMay: "This [blockade and political action] is almost as bad as the appeasement [of Hitler] at Munich... I think that a blockade, and political talk, would be considered by a lot of our friends and neutrals as being a pretty weak response to this. And I'm sure a lot of our own citizens would feel that way too.

"In other words, you're in a pretty bad fix at the present time."

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JFK and the Unspeakable

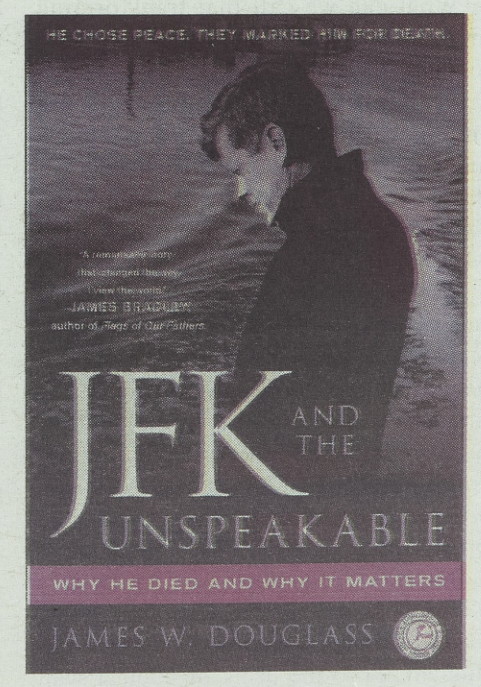
Why He Died and Why It Matters

by James W. Douglass

A new paperback edition published by Simon & Schuster (518 pages).

James Douglass is a longtime peace activist and one of the most important theologians of his generation. He is the author of *The Nonviolent Cross* and *Resistance and Contemplation*.

Douglass organized nonviolent campaigns to resist the Trident nuclear submarine and to protest the White Trains carrying nuclear weapons. With his wife Shelley, he is the cofounder of Mary's House, a Catholic Worker house of hospitality in Birmingham, Alabama.



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President Kennedy responded: "What did you say?"

LeMay: "I say, you're in a pretty bad fix."

President Kennedy: [laughing] "You're in with me, personally."

As the meeting drew to a close, Kennedy rejected totally the Joint Chiefs' arguments for a quick, massive attack on Cuba. The president then left the room but the tape kept on recording. Two or three of the generals remained, and one said to LeMay, "You pulled the rug right out from under him."

LeMay: "Jesus Christ. What the hell do you mean?"

Other General: "He's finally getting around to the word 'escalation.' If somebody could keep 'em from doing the *goddamn thing* piecemeal, *that's* our problem..." [12]

The White House tapes show Kennedy questioning and resisting the mounting pressure to bomb Cuba coming from both the Joint Chiefs and the Executive Committee of the National Security Council. At the same time, John Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev, the two men most responsible for the Cuban Missile Crisis, seemed locked in a hopeless ideological conflict. The U.S. and Soviet leaders had been following Cold War policies that now seemed to be moving inexorably toward a war of extermination.

Kennedy and Khrushchev: Two enemies become peacemakers

Yet, as we have since learned, Kennedy and Khrushchev had been engaged in a secret correspondence for over a year that gave signs of hope. Even as they moved publicly step by step toward a Cold War climax that would almost take the world over the edge with them, they were at the same time smuggling confidential letters back and forth that recognized each other's humanity and hoped for a solution. They were public enemies who, in the midst of deepening turmoil, were secretly learning something approaching trust in each other.

On what seemed the darkest day in the crisis, when a Soviet missile had shot down a U2 spy plane over Cuba, intensifying the already overwhelming pressures on Kennedy to bomb Cuba, the president sent his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, secretly to Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. RFK told Dobrynin, as Dobrynin reported to Khrushchev, that the president "didn't know how to resolve the situation. The military is putting great pressure on him... Even if he doesn't want or desire a war, something irreversible could occur against his will. That is why the President is asking for help to solve this problem." [13]

In his memoirs, Khrushchev recalled a further, chilling sentence from Robert Kennedy's appeal to Dobrynin: "If the situation continues much longer, the President is not sure that the military will not overthrow him and seize power." [14]

Sergei Khrushchev, Nikita's son, has described his father's thoughts when he read Dobrynin's wired report relaying John Kennedy's plea: "The president was calling for help: that was how father interpreted Robert Kennedy's talk with our ambassador." [15]

At a moment when the world was falling into darkness, Kennedy did what from his generals' standpoint was intolerable and unforgivable. JFK not only rejected his generals' pressures for war. Even worse, the president then reached out to their enemy, asking for help. That was treason.

Nikita Khrushchev and John Kennedy meet in Vienna, June 1961.
Photo from U. S. Dept. of State in John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.

Kennedy and Khrushchev, the Cold War enemies, each now had more in common with his opponent than either had with his own generals. As a result of that turn toward peace, one leader would be assassinated 13 months later. The other would be overthrown the following year.

When Nikita Khrushchev had received Kennedy's plea for help in Moscow, he turned to his Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and said, "We have to let Kennedy know that we want to help him."

Khrushchev stunned himself by what he had just said: Did he really want to help his enemy, Kennedy? Yes, he did. He repeated the word to his foreign minister:

"Yes, help. We now have a common cause, to save the world from those pushing us toward war." [16]

How do we understand that moment? The two most heavily armed leaders in history, on the verge of total nuclear war, suddenly joined hands against those on both sides pressuring them to attack. Khrushchev ordered the immediate withdrawal of his missiles from Cuba, in return for Kennedy's public pledge never to invade Cuba and his secret promise to withdraw U.S. missiles from Turkey — as he would in fact do.

'Love your enemies'

The two Cold War enemies had turned, so that each now had more in common with his opponent than either had with his own generals. As a result of that turn toward peace, one leader would be assassinated 13 months later. The other, left without his peacemaking partner, would be overthrown the following year. Yet because of their turn away from nuclear war, today we are still living and struggling for peace on this earth. Hope is alive. We still have a chance.

What can we call that transforming moment when Kennedy asked his enemy for help and Khrushchev gave it?

From a Buddhist standpoint, it was enlightenment of a cosmic kind. Others might call it a divine miracle. Readers of the Christian Gospels could say that Kennedy and Khrushchev were only doing what Jesus said: "Love your enemies."

That would be "love" as Gandhi understood it, love as the other side of truth, a respect and understanding of our opponents that goes far enough to integrate their truth into our own. In the last few months of Kennedy's life, he and Khrushchev were walking that extra mile where each was beginning to see the other's truth.

Neither John Kennedy nor Nikita Khrushchev was a saint. Each was deeply complicit in policies that brought humankind to the brink of nuclear war. Yet, when they encountered the void, then by turning to each other for help, they turned humanity toward the hope of a peaceful planet.

JFK's next Bay of Pigs

John Kennedy's next "Bay of Pigs," his next critical conflict with his national security state, was his American University Address. *Saturday Review* editor Norman Cousins summed up the significance of this remarkable speech: "At American University on June 10, 1963, President Kennedy proposed an end to the Cold War." [17]

I believe it is almost impossible to overemphasize the importance of President Kennedy's American University address. It was a decisive signal to both Nikita Khrushchev, on the one hand, and JFK's national security advisers, on the other, that he was serious about making peace with the Communists. After he told the graduating class at American University that the subject of his speech was "the most important topic on earth: world peace," he asked:

"What kind of peace do I mean? What kind of peace do we seek?"

He answered, "Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war." [18]

Kennedy's rejection of "a Pax Americana" was an act of resistance to the military-industrial complex. The military-industrial complex was totally dependent on "a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war."

That Pax Americana policed by the Pentagon was considered the system's indispensable, hugely profitable means of containing and defeating Communism. At his own risk, Kennedy was rejecting the foundation of the Cold War system.

In its place, as a foundation for peace, the president put a compassionate description of the suffering of the Russian people. They had been our allies during World War II and had suffered mightily. Yet even their World War II devastation would be small compared to the effects of a nuclear war on both their country and ours.

Committing heresy for peace

In his speech, Kennedy turned around the question that was always asked when it came to prospects for peace — the question, "What about the Russians?" It was assumed the Russians would take advantage of any move we might make toward peace.

Kennedy asked instead, "What about us?" He said, "Our attitude [toward peace] is as essential as theirs."

What about our attitude to the nuclear arms race? Within the overarching theology of our country, a theology of total good versus total evil, that was a heretical question, coming especially from the president of the United States.

Kennedy said he wanted to negotiate a nuclear test ban treaty with the Soviet Union in Moscow — in their capitol, not ours — as soon as possible. To clear the way for such a treaty, he said he was suspending U.S. atmospheric tests unilaterally.

Kennedy's strategy of peace penetrated the Soviet government's defenses far more effectively than any missile could have done. The Soviet press, which was accustomed to censoring U.S. government statements, published the entire speech all across the country. Soviet radio stations broadcast and rebroadcast the speech to the Soviet people. In response to Kennedy's turn toward peace, the Soviet government even stopped jamming all Western broadcasts into their country.

Khrushchev was deeply moved by the American University Address. He said Kennedy had given "the greatest speech by any American President since Roosevelt." [19]

His speech was received less favorably in his own country. The *New York Times* reported his government's skepticism: "Generally there was not much optimism in official Washington that the President's conciliation address at American University would produce agreement on a test ban treaty or anything else." [20]

In contrast to the Soviet media that were electrified by the speech, the U.S. media ignored or downplayed it. For the first time, Americans had less opportunity to read and hear their president's words than did the Russian people. A turnaround was occurring in the world on different levels. Whereas nuclear disarmament had suddenly become feasible, Kennedy's position in his own government had become precarious.

Nuclear test ban treaty

President Kennedy's next critical conflict with his national security state, propelling him toward the coup d'etat he saw as possible, was the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty that he signed with Nikita Khrushchev on July 25, 1963, six weeks after the American University Address. The president had done an end run around the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He negotiated the Test Ban Treaty without consulting them, because they opposed it.

Kennedy was fiercely determined but not optimistic that the Test Ban Treaty be ratified by the defense-conscious Senate. In early August, he told his advisers that getting Senate ratification of the agreement would be "almost in the nature of a miracle." [21] He said if a Senate vote were held right then it would fall far short of the necessary two-thirds.

JFK initiated a whirlwind public education campaign on the treaty, coordinated by *Saturday Review* editor Normal Cousins, who directed a committee of activists. By the end of August, the tide of congressional mail had gone from 15 to one against a test ban to three to two against.

In September 1963, public opinion polls showed a turnaround — 80 percent of the American people were now in favor of the Test Ban Treaty. On September 24, 1963, the Senate approved the treaty by a vote of 80 to 19 — 14 more than the required two-thirds. No other single accomplishment in the White House gave Kennedy greater satisfaction.

On September 20, Kennedy spoke to the United Nations. He suggested that its members see the Test Ban Treaty as a beginning and engage together in an experiment in peace:

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"Two years ago I told this body that the United States had proposed, and was willing to sign, a Limited Test Ban treaty. Today that treaty has been signed. It will not put an end to war. It will not remove basic conflicts. It will not secure freedom for all. But it can be a lever, and Archimedes, in explaining the principles of the lever, was said to have declared to his friends: 'Give me a place where I can stand — and I shall move the world.'

"My fellow inhabitants of this planet: Let us take our stand here in this Assembly of nations. And let us see if we, in our own time, can move the world to a just and lasting peace."

JFK REACHES OUT TO CUBA

When he said these words, Kennedy was secretly engaging in another risky experiment in peace. That same day at the United Nations, Kennedy told UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson that his assistant William Attwood should go ahead "to make discreet contact" with Cuba's UN Ambassador Carlos Lechuga. Was Fidel Castro interested in a dialogue with John Kennedy? A strongly affirmative answer would come back from Castro, who had been repeatedly urged by Khrushchev to begin trusting Kennedy.

Kennedy and Castro actually began that dialogue on normalizing U.S.-Cuban relations, through the mediation of French journalist Jean Daniel who personally visited both men in the month leading up to the assassination. Daniel was actually eating lunch with Castro in his home on November 22, conveying Kennedy's hopeful words, when the Cuban premier was phoned with the news of Kennedy's death. Castro's somber comment to Daniel was: "Everything is changed. Everything is going to change." [22]

JFK'S TOP-SECRET ORDER TO BEGIN WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM

On October 11, 1963, President Kennedy issued a top-secret order to begin withdrawing the U.S. military from Vietnam. In National Security Action Memorandum 263, he ordered that 1,000 U.S. military personnel be withdrawn from Vietnam by the end of 1963, and that the bulk of U.S. personnel be taken out by the end of 1965.

Kennedy decided on his withdrawal policy, against the arguments of most of his advisers, at a contentious National Security Council meeting on October 2. When Defense Secretary Robert McNamara was leaving the meeting to announce the withdrawal to the White House reporters, "the President called to him, 'And tell them that means all of the helicopter pilots, too.'" [23]

In fact, it would not mean that at all. After JFK's assassination, his withdrawal policy was quietly voided. In light of the future consequences of Dallas, it was not only John Kennedy who was murdered on November 22, 1963, but 58,000 other Americans and over three million Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians.

In his reflections on *Seven Days in May*, John Kennedy had given himself three Bay-of-Pigs-type conflicts with his national security state before a possible coup. What about six?

(1) The Bay of Pigs.

(2) The Cuban Missile Crisis.

(3) The American University Address.

(4) The Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

(5) The beginning of a back-channel dialogue with Fidel Castro.

(6) JFK's order to withdraw U.S. troops from Vietnam.

This, however, is a short list of the increasing conflicts between Kennedy and his national security state.

John and Jacqueline Kennedy in the Dallas motorcade on Nov. 22, 1963, shortly before his assassination. Photo by Victor Hugo King, placed in the public domain

We can add to the list a seventh Bay of Pigs — the steel crisis, in which he profoundly alienated the military-industrial complex before the Cuban Missile Crisis even took place. The steel crisis was a showdown the president had with U.S. Steel and seven other steel companies over their price-fixing violations of an agreement he had negotiated between U.S. Steel and the United Steelworkers.

In a head-on confrontation with the ruling elite of Big Steel, JFK ordered the Defense Department to switch huge military contracts away from the major steel companies to the smaller, more loyal contractors that had not defied him. After the big steel companies bitterly backed down from their price raises, JFK and his brother, Robert, were denounced as symbols of "ruthless power" by the Wall Street power brokers at the center of the military-industrial complex.

By an editorial titled, "Steel: The Ides of April" (the month in which Kennedy faced down the steel executives), Henry Luce's *Fortune* magazine called to readers' minds the soothsayer's warning in Shakespeare of the assassination of Julius Caesar. *Fortune* was warning Kennedy that his actions had confirmed the worst fears of corporate America about his presidency, and would have dire consequences. As interpreted by the most powerful people in the nation, the steel crisis was a logical prelude to Dallas. It was a seventh Bay of Pigs.

JFK REACHES OUT TO THIRD WORLD

An eighth Bay of Pigs was Kennedy's diplomatic opening to the fiery Third-World leadership of President Sukarno of Indonesia. Sukarno was "the most outspoken proponent of Third World neutralism in the Cold War." He had actually coined the term "Third World." The CIA wanted Sukarno dead. It wanted what it saw as his pro-communist "global orientation" obliterated. During Eisenhower's presidency, the CIA repeatedly tried to kill and overthrow Sukarno but failed.

JFK, however, chose to work with Sukarno, hoping to win him over as an ally, which he did. Sukarno came to love Kennedy. The U.S. president resolved what seemed a hopeless conflict between Indonesia and its former colonial master, the Netherlands, averting a war. To the CIA's dismay, in 1961 Kennedy welcomed Sukarno to the White House.

Most significantly, three days before his assassination, President Kennedy said he was willing to accept Sukarno's invitation to visit Indonesia the following spring. His visit to Indonesia would have dramatized in a very visible way Kennedy's support of Third World nationalism, a sea change in U.S. government policy. That decision to visit Sukarno was an eighth Bay of Pigs.

JFK's Indonesian policy was also killed in Dallas, with horrendous consequences. After Lyndon Johnson became president, the CIA finally succeeded in overthrowing Sukarno in a massive purge of suspected Communists that ended up killing 500,000 to one million Indonesians.

KENNEDY'S PROPOSAL FOR A JOINT U.S.-SOVIET MOON LANDING

Recently, I interviewed Sergei Khrushchev about an important late development in the relationship between his father and President Kennedy. In his interview, Mr. Khrushchev confirmed that his father had decided in November 1963 to accept President Kennedy's repeated proposal that the United States and the Soviet Union fly to the moon together.

In his September 20, 1963, speech to the United Nations, JFK had once again stated his hope for such a joint expedition to the moon. However, neither American nor Soviet military leaders, jealous of their rocket secrets, were ready to accept his initiative. Nikita Khrushchev, siding with his own rocket experts, felt he was still forced to decline Kennedy's proposal.

JFK was looking beyond the myopia of the generals and scientists on both sides of the East-West struggle. He knew that merging their missile technologies in a peaceful project would also help defuse the Cold War. It was part of his day-by-day strategy of peace.

Sergei Khrushchev said his father talked to him about a week before Kennedy's death on the president's idea for a joint lunar mission. Nikita Khrushchev had broken ranks with his rocket scientists. He now thought he and the Soviet Union should accept Kennedy's invitation to go to the moon together, as a further step in peaceful cooperation.

In Washington, Kennedy acted as if he already knew about Khrushchev's hopeful change of heart on that critical issue. JFK was already telling NASA to begin work on a joint U.S.-Soviet lunar mission. On November 12, 1963, JFK issued his National Security Action Memorandum 271, ordering NASA to implement his "September 20 proposal for broader cooperation between the United States and the USSR in outer space, including cooperation in lunar landing programs."

That further visionary step to end the Cold War also died with Kennedy. The United States went to the moon alone. U.S. and Soviet rockets continued to be pointed at their opposite countries rather than being joined in a project for a more hopeful future. Sergei Khrushchev said, "I think if Kennedy had lived, we would be living in a completely different world."

JFK MEETS THE QUAKERS

In the final weeks of his presidency, President Kennedy took one more risky step toward peace. It can be seen in relation to a meeting he had the year before with six Quakers who visited him in his office. One thousand members of the Society of Friends had been vigiling for peace and world order outside the White House. Kennedy agreed to meet with six of their leaders.

I have interviewed all three survivors of that meeting with the president 47 years ago. They remain uniformly amazed at the open way in which Kennedy listened and responded to their radical Quaker critique of his foreign policy.

Among their challenges to him was a recommendation that the United States offer its surplus food to the People's Republic of China. China was considered an enemy nation. Yet it was also one whose people were beset by a famine.

Kennedy said to the Quakers, "Do you mean you would feed your enemy when he has his hands on your throat?" [24]

The Quakers said they meant exactly that. They reminded him it was what Jesus had said should be done. Kennedy said he knew that, and knew that it was the right thing to do, but he couldn't overcome the China lobby in Washington to accomplish it.

FEEDING THE ENEMY

Nevertheless, a year and a half later in the fall of 1963, against overwhelming opposition, Kennedy decided to sell wheat to the Russians, who had a severe grain shortage. His outraged critics said in effect to him what he had said to the Quakers: Would you feed an enemy who has his hands on your throat?

Vice President Lyndon Johnson said he thought Kennedy's decision to sell wheat to Russia would turn out to be the worst political mistake he ever made. Today JFK's controversial decision "to feed the enemy" has been forgotten. In 1963, the wheat sale was seen as a threat to our security — feeding the enemy to kill us. Yet JFK went ahead with it, as one more initiative for peace.

The violent reaction to his decision was represented on Friday morning, November 22, 1963, by a threatening, full-page advertisement addressed to him in the *Dallas Morning News*. The ad was bordered in black, like a funeral notice. Among the charges of disloyalty to the nation that the ad made against the president was the question: "Why have you approved the sale of wheat and corn to our enemies when you know the Communist soldiers 'travel on their stomach' just as ours do?"

JFK TALKS ABOUT ASSASSINATION

JFK read the ad before the flight from Fort Worth to Dallas, pointed it out to Jacqueline Kennedy, and talked about the possibility of his being assassinated that day. "But, Jackie," he said, "if somebody wants to shoot me from a window with a rifle, nobody can stop it, so why worry about it?" [25]

President Kennedy's courageous turn from war to a strategy of peace provided many more than three Bay-of-Pigs-type causes for his assassination. Because he turned toward peace with our enemies, the Communists, he was continually at odds with his own national security state.

Peacemaking was at the top of his agenda as president. That was not the kind of leadership the CIA, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the military-industrial complex wanted in the White House. Given the Cold War dogmas that gripped those dominant powers, and given Kennedy's turn toward peace, his assassination followed as a matter of course.

That is how he seemed to regard the situation — that it would soon lead to his own death. JFK was not afraid of death. As a biographer observed, "Kennedy talked a great deal about death, and about the assassination of Lincoln." [26]

His conscious model for struggling truthfully through conflict, and being ready to die as a consequence, was

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Abraham Lincoln. On the day when Kennedy and Khrushchev resolved the missile crisis, JFK told his brother, Robert, referring to the assassination of Lincoln, "This is the night I should go to the theater." Robert replied, "If you go, I want to go with you." [27]

Kennedy prepared himself for the same end Lincoln met during his night at the theater. Late at night on the June 5, 1961, plane flight back to Washington, D.C., from his Vienna meeting with Nikita Khrushchev, a weary President Kennedy wrote down on a slip of paper, as he was about to fall asleep, a favorite saying of his from Abraham Lincoln — really a prayer.

Presidential secretary Evelyn Lincoln discovered the slip of paper on the floor. On it she read the words: "I know there is a God — and I see a storm coming. If he has a place for me, I believe that I am ready." [28]

Kennedy loved that prayer. He cited it repeatedly. More important, he made the prayer his own. In his conflicts with Khrushchev, then more profoundly with the CIA and the military, he had seen a storm coming. If God had a place for him, he believed that he was ready.

John F. Kennedy's funeral procession leaves the White House on the way to St. Matthew's Cathedral on Nov. 25, 1963. A color guard holding the presidential colors, and the riderless horse, "Black Jack," follow behind. Photo by Abbie Rowe

RENDEZVOUS WITH DESTINY

For at least a decade, JFK's favorite poem had been "Rendezvous," a celebration of death. "Rendezvous" was written by Alan Seeger, an American poet killed in World War I. The poem was Seeger's affirmation of his own anticipated death.

The refrain of "Rendezvous" — "I have a rendezvous with Death" — articulated Kennedy's deep sense of his own mortality. He had experienced a continuous rendezvous with death in anticipation of his actual death: from the deaths of his PT boat crew members, from drifting alone in the dark waters of the Pacific Ocean, from the early deaths of his brother Joe and sister Kathleen, and from the recurring near-death experiences of his almost constant illnesses.

He recited "Rendezvous" to his wife Jacqueline in 1953 on their first night home in Hyannis after their honeymoon. She memorized the poem, and recited it back to him over the years. In the fall of 1963, Jackie taught the words of the poem to their five-year-old daughter, Caroline.

I have thought many times about what then took place in the White House Rose Garden one beautiful fall day.

On the morning of October 5, 1963, President Kennedy met with his National Security Council in the Rose Garden. Caroline suddenly appeared at her father's side. She said she wanted to tell him something. He tried to divert her attention while the meeting continued. Caroline persisted. The president smiled and turned his full attention to his daughter. He told her to go ahead. While the members of the National Security Council sat and watched, Caroline looked into her father's eyes and said:

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,
When Spring comes back with rustling shade
And apple-blossoms fill the air —
I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land
And close my eyes and quench my breath—
It may be I shall pass him still.
I have a rendezvous with Death
On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When Spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow-flowers appear.

God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear....
But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town,
When Spring trips north again this year,
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

After Caroline said the poem's final word, "rendezvous," Kennedy's national security advisers sat in stunned silence. One of them said later the bond between father and daughter was so deep "it was as if there was 'an inner music' he was trying to teach her." [29]

JFK had heard his own acceptance of death from the lips of his daughter. While surrounded by a National Security Council that opposed his breakthrough to peace, the president once again deepened his pledge not to fail that rendezvous. If God had a place for him, he believed that he was ready.

So how can the *why* of his murder give us hope? Where do we find hope when a peacemaking president is assassinated by his own national security state?

The *why* of Kennedy's assassination encircles the earth. Because John Kennedy chose peace on earth at the height of the Cold War, he was executed. But because he turned toward peace, in spite of the consequences to himself, humanity is still alive and struggling. That is hopeful, especially if we understand what he went through and what he has given to us as his vision.

A PROFILE IN COURAGE

At a certain point in his presidency, John Kennedy turned a corner and didn't look back. I believe that decisive turn toward his final purpose in life, resulting in his death, happened in the darkness of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Although Kennedy was already in conflict with his national security managers, the missile crisis was the breaking point.

At that most critical moment for us all, he turned from any remaining control his security managers had over him toward a deeper ethic, a deeper vision in which the fate of the earth became his priority. Without losing sight of our own best hopes in this country, he began to home in, with his new partner, Nikita Khrushchev, on the hope of peace for everyone on this earth — Russians, Americans, Cubans, Vietnamese, Indonesians, everyone — no exceptions. He made that commitment to life at the cost of his own.

What a transforming story that is.

And what a propaganda campaign has been waged to keep us Americans from understanding that story, from telling it, and from re-telling it to our children and grandchildren.

Because that's a story whose telling can transform a nation. But when a nation is under the continuing domination of an idol, namely war, it is a story that will be covered up. When the story can liberate us from our idolatry of war, then the worshippers of the idol are going to do everything they can to keep the story from being told. From the standpoint of a belief that war is the ultimate power, that's too dangerous a story. It's a subversive story. It shows a different kind of security than always being ready to go to war.

It's unbelievable — or we're supposed to think it is — that a president was murdered by our own government agencies because he was seeking a more stable peace than relying on nuclear weapons. It's unspeakable.

For the sake of a nation that must always be preparing for war, that story must not be told. If it were, we might learn that peace is possible without making war. We might even learn there is a force more powerful than war. How unthinkable! But how necessary if life on earth is to continue.

That is why it is so hopeful for us to confront the unspeakable and to tell the transforming story of a man of courage, President John F. Kennedy. It is a story ultimately not of death but of life — all our lives. In the end, it is not so much a story of one man as it is a story of peacemaking when the chips are down. That story is our story, a story of hope.

GIVING THANKS FOR A PEACEMAKER

I believe it is a providential fact that the anniversary of President Kennedy's assassination always falls around Thanksgiving, and periodically on that very day. This year the anniversary of his death occurred on the beginning of the week of Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is a beautiful time of year, with autumn leaves falling to create new life. Creation is alive, as the season turns. The earth is alive. It is not a radioactive wasteland. We can give special thanks for that.

The fact that we are still living — that the human family is still alive with a fighting chance for survival, and for much more than that — is reason for gratitude to a peacemaking president, and to the unlikely alliance he forged with his enemy. So let us give thanks for John F. Kennedy, and for his partner in peacemaking, Nikita Khrushchev.

Their story is our story, a story of the courage to turn toward the truth. Remember what Gandhi said that turned theology on its head. He said truth is God. That is the truth: Truth is God. We can discover the truth and live it out. There is nothing more powerful than the truth. The truth will set us free.

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